

THE SWINE-GODS

In my dream I wandered along an endless lane, gray as the smoke of twilight ere night hath kindled the fires of her stars upon God's hearth-place. It wound ceaselessly on and on as a grey serpent uncoiling; the trees were lean and dismal, and gloomed like clouds through the besetting mists.

I grew weary wandering its arid spaces; my feet saddened and my heart sank within me.

And there came by a little child whose face was peaked with sobbing,

and whose hair was wild, and that had a broken wing upon its shoulder.

I said : " Where am I ? "

It said : " This is the Long Lane of the Lost, and I am a Lost Love."

And it passed on.

And there came another child, with an elfin face that held a ruined laughter, and whose rose-red robe was tattered.

I said : " Who art thou ? "

She said : " I am a lost Hour of Delight and there is mud upon my feet."

And she went on.

She was followed by a third child in a gown that had once been skyey-blue, but was faded to drabness by wind and weather. She bare withered lilies in her arm and at her kirtle hung a broken lute.

I said : " Who art thou ? "

And she looked at me with eyes wherein the violets had paled and said :
" I am a Lost Illusion, for all things lost wander along this Lane."

I said : " Is there no house within it ? For I am weary of my bitter way-faring, and it hath no end."

She made answer : " There is no rest-house but one."

I said : " Where ? "

Then she pointed, saying : " Yonder," and passed by also.

I looked where she had shewn to me and saw, beyond the mist, a palace with mighty walls frowning on high and pinnaces and towers that were fashioned curiously.

I went on towards it and lo ! the bridge fell clashing from invisible hands

above a river that ran murk and drear about it. The gates and doorways of bronze stood wide and nowhere was there a keeper and straightway I entered in.

As I passed I heard from afar, a moaning as of one in pain and the baying of a distant pack. I wondered who it was that hunted a-down the Long Lane of the Lost.

And I went marvelling into the silent palace.

I found myself within a hall greater than any dreamed of by men, and built entirely with pillars and walls of black porphyry and basalt.

The heavy columns frowned stupendously ; a sable dome seemed to soar above me in its giddy heights, where beasts and bats with harpy faces

and dusk wings, circled without cess, flapping and screaming. The floors were of black jade that shimmered like a haunted mere. And from the pillars hung pendants of black crystal shining frostily, while in the crevices of the flags, the pediments and colonnades, raven flowers like creatures of death moved and spread their petals until they seemed as greedy, voracious mouths. At either end of the hall there was a furnace of red fire, in the midst whereof, beyond steps of black marble, loomed a terrific Baal of iron to which many acolytes were sacrificing.

I went towards the Baal at the right end of the hall.

The glow of the fires in all that surrounding opaqueness dazzled me. For

a time I stood deafened by the crackle and roar of the flames from the core of the furnace. Then as my sight cleared, I saw a huge Moloch, with wide-open jaws and molten flaring hands and a head fashioned in the image of a Swine, whose snout belched fire.

Before him were priests with shaven heads and leering faces, attired also in black. And each one bare a little silent flame of blue or white or red or green towards a High-Priest, who stood in the centre of the uppermost step before the Baal.

The High-Priest towered above the others and his robes shone with black jade. I could not see his face, but upon his head there were eagle-feathers and his foot was cloven.

And the High-Priest chanted, saying : " Master Mammon, O God Mammon, alway we find thy fuel and thy eternal fires never die, although thy hands are burnt unto white embers. O God above the other Gods of whom the world craves grace, since the dawning hath thy house been set upon sure foundations. Thy lures are deeper than the sockets of the sea ; thy pride is ever fed, thy tents spread out their mighty camps in mockery of the Lord.

Behold ! begetter of men, we do thine ancient service."

And one of the priests came forward and the little flame that burnt upon the platter in his hands was white.

And he gave it to him of the cloven foot, droning : " Arch-Flamen, this is the soul of a very young maid. Her

limbs and body are as folded flowers, but her parents have sold her to an old man who hath much gold in his coffers. His lips are frore and blue, his breath is as the odour of death and his heart is as a satyr's."

Then the Arch-Priest lifted the white flame high, so that it lay close beneath the searing fire of the Swine-Baal's snout.

And crying : " O Mammon, the sweet savour of thy Virgin-bride ! " he cast it down into the molten hands.

The fire hissed up once and crackled and burnt on.

Now there came a second priest, with a little blue flame, saying :

" This is the soul of a poet who dreamt exquisite dreams and went

hungerful and there were very few to hearken.

Yet desire came to him, so he cast away his dreams and sang of vileness and abominable things. But the people flocked to hear and cried : ' More ! More ! '

He said : ' Verily, I will give ye more of my obscenities, if ye will give me your gold.'

Then they laughed, and stripped the coins from their hair and the bracelets from their arms.

And he sang on."

And the High-Priest cast the blue flame in, saying : " All the dreams and songs, the ideals and quests of the world are thine, O Master Mammon."

Next there came one bearing a red

flame, who said : " This is the heart of a man who loved a maiden dearly.

She had only one gown and no jewels for her anklets, but her soul was pure as the dews of the dawn.

And he came unto a house wherein there dwelt a harlot, who had been the dancing-woman of the Caliphs. Her bed was hung with silk, her tables were of chalcedony, her ewers of silver and she had pearls upon her kirtle-zone.

And she said : ' I lust for thy youth and strength. Thou art as an oak and I as a palm that is broken. Abide with me ! '

Then he looked upon her pearls and the chalcedony and barred the doors of her house against his love in the robe of white linen.

And her heart brake, but he drank of the wine in the ewers and forgot."

The red flame fell into the crimson fire and the Arch-Priest said: "O Master Mammon, O Breaker and Maker of hearts, O shaper of ways and wielder of destinies!"

Thereon came a priest bearing a yellow flame and he said:

"This is the soul of a man who was the favourite Vizier of the King, who had raised him up from the poor of his city and set him within his gates.

The King gave him of his lands and much power besides, wherefore his house was almost as rich as the palace of his master.

But this Vizier had a wife who had also been of the poor of the King's city and could not rise to fit her place.

And the Vizier left her and she grew old as a crone.

Then he cast his eyes upon the King's wife, who was fair and wore a tiar of emeralds on her head. And the King's wife looked upon him and he won her favours, for she was vain and his tongue was subtil.

And one night as he was secretly in the Queen's closet, he gazed about him at the rare trceries of gems and gold, and said :

' My house is not so great nor my wife so young and lovely. There is priceless treasure within the treasure-chambers. Why should not I wear the royal cloak and crown and make this woman my Queen ? '

Then he rose up from her arms and stole privily into the bed-chamber

of the King and stabbed him to death in his sleep."

And the Arch-Priest cast the yellow flame into the scarlet pit, chanting :
" All the flowers of the world's envy
and the fruits of the world's passion
are woven into thy garland, Master
Mammon ! "

But I was sickened, and turned away and went over to the Baal that stood in the fiery furnace at the left end of the hall.

And lo ! here too were priests bearing the soul-flames. Only their vessels were not of gold and silver, but of iron and steel. And the head of the Moloch was different, for it was that of a boar. From his jaws protruded two great tusks like spikes and from them burst alternate flame and smoke, amid

an angry roaring that clattered through all his tremendous iron bulk.

But the High-Priest before him was as the one before the image of Mammon and had a cloven foot also.

And he chanted : " O Master Mars, O Master Mars, all nature is thy pawn. Thou battenest upon the weak in the numberless degrees of thy strength. Thou art the lord of the sharp fang, the ravenous maw, the piercing beak, the leaping beast. The Christs, Messiahs and prophets, the priests and angels fail before thee. The rot of thy carrion and the stench of thy carcasses ascend unto the portals of Heaven and their hellish incense defies the rose-haunted closes of Paradise. . . .

Thou art the lord of the Valley of the Shadow, the moving scythe of

death ; thy arms grapple with youth immortally. Thou art the despoiler of the divine in Man ; thou demandest unending sacrifice and lo ! it is given. For every son of woman, every creature of earth and sea and air are thine, thou Ravisher of the Eternities ! ”

And there came a priest bearing a flame, who said : “ Lord, this is the soul of a young man who was the only son of his mother and she a widow.

They dwelt happily together, for he tilled her field and gat her oil and cracknels with the labour of his hands ; while she gloried in the strength of him and the hair which was a gold fleece on his head and as the hair of the lover of her youth.

But the great Kings quarrelled in high places. They carried division into the land and laid it waste and despoiled its maidens.

Then the young husbandman said :
' My mother, I must lay by the plough-share and the pruning-hook and seize a lance and buckler in their stead. Farewell ! '

She clung to him, tearless and numb for the greatness of her sorrow, and said : ' Haste home to me again. For thou art my all in the world and there is no other footfall that comes to me over the hills.'

He said : ' I will return.'

But he never came, for the sling-stone of a foeman struck his temple and he was trampled out of human semblance and into blood and mire by

the stampeding chargers of the King's horsemen.

And his mother died alone of her broken heart."

Then the Arch-Priest seized the flame and hurled it in, saying :

"May this fair fume arise to thee, my Sire ! Thine is the sweet first-fruit of all manhood, thine the eye-apple of maternity, thine the throne-jewels of a Sultan's vassalry."

Next there came a second priest, with a blood-red flame.

He said : "This is the soul of one who was the maker of machines of torment and torture.

He pored by night and by day to evolve strange gases that slay and metal monsters that devour.

He joyed when the fields ran foul

with gore and entrails, where myriads of men had stood an hour a-gone, because of his devices.

He was crowned with glory and given great rewards by the ruler of his land."

And the Arch-Priest cast it in, saying :
" O Mars, thou unknitter of bones, thou destroyer of flesh, thou glutton of limbs, thou wine-bibber of blood : accept thy sacrament ! "

Yet there came another priest, bearing a flame that was almost black upon a platter of iron.

He spake : " This is the soul of a mighty King.

His palaces were gemmed with the riches of the world, his ships traversed the seven seas, his merchants sate in conclave, his armies were strong as

the hosts of heaven, his throne was firm as the plinth of the sun.

He dreamed long beneath his canopies of his exceeding wealth, all things were at his service and decree. One day as he sat thus upon the dais of his pleasure-palace, idly toying with his sceptre, he said unto his minister : ' Hast thou ever seen a greater ruby or one of more brilliance than that upon my head-band ? '

The counsellor replied : ' Yea, my Liege, for there is a larger one of more surpassing lustre in the fillet of the King of the Yonder-Land.'

The King said : ' Have it brought unto me ! '

But the minister replied : ' I cannot, for it belongeth to this King and is the heirloom of his heritage.'

The King asked : ' Hath he other jewels ? '

The counsellor answered : ' His is the only realm which rivalleth thine. His caskets overflow, his daughters are fair, his kingdom is peaceful, his people happy and toil pleasantly in the fertile fields.'

But the King's face grew dark with envy and his nostrils distended.

He said : ' Call out my guards and mariners, for I will wrest his kingdom from him. There shall be no other King but me, no other Empire but mine own ; I will rule unto the four ends of the earth.'

And he sent his rushing armies upon the Yonder-Land. Its rich fields were turned to seas of mud, its houses and temples to ruins, its castles looted,

its Kings and young men slain, its Virgins defiled, its children and old women murdered.

But the ruby of the Yonder-Land glowed beside the other ruby in the head-band of the baleful King.

And he cried to his overseers and chamberlains : ' My Empire hath grown greater and there are now no other Kings on land or sea.

Whip up my slaves with your scourges, O overseers ; tax my people, O satraps, and let them rebuild the Yonder-Land and found new palaces unto my paramours and temples to my god's.' "

And the Arch-Priest cast the flame into the fire, saying : " Thou art the King of the blood-stained places, of the desolate and razed cities ; thine

are the women killed with child, the ravished, the brutally slaughtered. Thine are tyranny and persecution, the anguish of wounded beasts, the offerings of the oppressed and tithed. Thine are the groans of slaves, the whistle of whips, the sweats of exceeding labour, O Master Mars, O God of War ! ”

Then sorrow seized upon me and I ran forth as one possessed from that sable House of Mammon and Mars, with its dirging priests, its jeering litanies, its ceaseless sacrifices of human souls, its molten Swine-Gods amid its howling, insatiable fires.

As I sped out through the brazen gates and over the drawbridge, I heard again the baying of dogs and the monotonous moaning.

And as I reached the Long Lane of the Lost, there swept past me a pack of hounds in full cry.

Some were yellow as flame, some red as fire and others black as night. And they belled and raced like the wind.

As I gazed at them aghast, there came a clattering of hooves and behold ! upon a great white horse, which had a crystal jewel set between its eyes and whose mane flew out in the storm, rode an Angel clad in black, who blew that wailing music upon a silver horn.

He had neither saddle nor stirrup nor rein, and yet rode fleetly after the manner of God's legionaries.

I caught at his robe, crying : " Huntsman ! Huntsman ! "

He paused a moment, saying :
“ What wouldst thou ? ”

And I saw that his face was white and sad as that of one whom chill winds have beaten. His hair was dewy and his great wings draggled with rain.

I said : “ What pack be this ? ”

He said : “ The sleuth-hounds of God are passing down the Long Lane of the Lost. The black hounds are the moments of Pain, the red of Passion and the yellow of Remorse. We are hard upon the heels of a human soul that is seeking for the House of Mammon and Mars.”

I said : “ O Huntsman, who art thou ? ”

Then he smiled upon me with the sadness of his eyes, and answered :
“ The Eternal Conscience.”

And blowing a mournful "Halloo !
Hallo ! " upon his silver horn, he
shook me loose and was gone after
the yelping pack.

And I cried out in terror and awoke.